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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/BCLTV, EAP/RSP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: ASEAN: MFA PUTS SPIN ON MEETING - PUSHES THAI
UNSYG CANDIDATE

[11.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY: In an unusual move, the MFA summoned the diplomatic corps to a briefing on the results of the recently completed ASEAN Ministerial, Post Ministerial, ASEAN plus Three and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The MFA touched on Rangoon's decision to forgo its turn as ASEAN Chair, UN reform, the East Asia Summit, proposals for an ASEAN Charter and ASEAN Defense Ministerial meeting, and readouts of the ASEAN plus One sessions. However, MFA officials spent much of the briefing emphasizing Thai Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart's bid to become UNSYG. While ostensibly about ASEAN, the MFA's briefing appears to be another attempt to create momentum behind Surakiart's candidacy for UNSYG. END SUMMARY

[12.](#) (SBU) On August 3, the Thai MFA summoned the diplomatic corps for a briefing on the outcome of the ASEAN Ministerial, Post Ministerial, ASEAN Plus Three and ARF meetings which had been held in Vientiane July 25-29. The briefing was lead by Suriya Chindawongse, MFA's ASEAN policy director. Suriya said the briefing had been called to emphasize the "highly successful" nature of the ASEAN meetings, and to highlight key issues on the ASEAN agenda.

BURMA

[13.](#) (U) Suriya touched briefing on Rangoon's decision to forgo their rotation as ASEAN Chair in 2006. MFA officials distributed copies of the July 26 Statement by ASEAN Foreign Ministers announcing that Burma had decided to relinquish its turn to be ASEAN Chair. Suriya emphasized that the decision to pass the Chair, while welcomed by ASEAN, was Burma's alone.

UN REFORM

[14.](#) (SBU) MFA also distributed copies of the July 26 ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on UN reform. Suriya emphasized the statement was a "consensus" document, and that ASEAN was concerned that the push by "some" countries for a permanent seat on the Security Council was divisive and is distracting from a comprehensive approach to reform at the UN.

EAST ASIA SUMMIT

[15.](#) (U) There was a brief discussion on the December 14 East Asia Summit (EAS). Suriya confirmed that the EAS would be chaired by ASEAN and that China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India had all met the three criteria endorsed by ASEAN for inclusion in the EAS. Suriya noted that Russia had expressed interest in the EAS but that a consensus had not been reached within ASEAN and that the EU's request for observer status is being considered. Suriya also indicated that ASEAN would press to have the EAS held every two years (vice three).

ASEAN CHARTER

[16.](#) (U) Suriya described ASEAN's "long-term project" of building an ASEAN Charter. Suriya noted that ASEAN was in the process of creating an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to provide Charter recommendations to ASEAN in time for the 2006 summit. He said the EPG would be made up of mostly former leaders of ASEAN countries -- naming former Philippine President Fidel Ramos as one possibility.

ASEAN DEFENSE MINISTERIAL MEETING

[17.](#) (U) Suriya commented on the progress for a proposed ASEAN Defense Ministerial meeting. He said that ASEAN members are still "building consensus" on details for a Ministerial but there is agreement in principle for such a meeting. Suriya confirmed that Thailand has offered to host the proposed Ministerial which they hoped would take place in [2006](#).

ASEAN PLUS ONE

[18.](#) (SBU) MFA provided a brief readout on each of the ASEAN plus One meetings. The July 28 meeting with the U.S. was characterized as "positive," with coordination on a range of issues. The Thais emphasized the proposal to develop an

enhanced partnership with the U.S. and the positive contribution that the U.S.'s ASEAN Cooperation Plan made to the ASEAN Secretariat. Suriya noted that ASEAN had urged the U.S. to work on a region-wide Trade and Investment Framework Agreement.

SURAKIART'S UNSYG CANDIDACY

19. (SBU) During the briefing MFA officials repeatedly referred to Deputy Prime Minister (and former Foreign Minister) Surakiart Sathirathai's public campaign to become the next UN Secretary General. Suriya called Surakiart "ASEAN's, not Thailand's candidate" and claimed that the candidacy had been a topic "in all the meetings." He said that ASEAN members had agreed to a coordinated policy to promote Surakiart's bid and that member states would pursue the candidacy as "the ASEAN candidate" because "ASEAN believes this is Asia's turn."

10. (SBU) COMMENT: MFA's summoning of the entire diplomatic corps after a relatively routine ASEAN meeting is highly unusual. In the past, briefings for the dip corps has been reserved for issues that require the Thai government to offer an explanation for highly controversial events -- most recently the issuance of the Emergency Decree that replaced Martial Law in far southern Thailand. For many of the diplomats present -- notably representatives from African or South American nations -- ASEAN issues are not usually at the top of their policy agenda. While the August 3 briefing was ostensibly about ASEAN, it became quickly apparent that the command performance was simply a pretext for the Thais to continue their push of Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart's ambitious bid to become UNSYG. END COMMENT
ARVIZU